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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000623

SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [SO](#)  
SUBJECT: SOMALIA - REVISITING THE MEDIA LAW

REF: 07 NAIROBI 4797

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Summary  
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¶1. (SBU) The Transitional Federal Government's (TFG) new Minister of Information, Farahan Ali Mohamed, is making an effort to revisit and ratify the media law that was endorsed by Parliament in 2007 but never signed by former TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf. Several journalist associations are involved in advocacy on behalf of the media, who seek legal protection from the threats against freedom of the press in Somalia. We are in contact with both the Minister and the journalists, working to ensure both parties remain aware of our desire to see a free and vibrant press in Somalia, where the media has suffered countless threats in the past 18 years. End summary.

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The Journalists' View  
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¶2. (SBU) The National Media Council (NMC) of Somalia, an association of fifteen members called for in the draft media law, has embarked on an effort to revisit and have ratified Somalia's media law, which was endorsed by Parliament in 2007 but never signed by former Transitional Federal Government (TFG) President Abdullahi Yusuf (reftel). Somalia is cited by one organization as the one of the most dangerous places in the world, second only to Iraq, for media practitioners, and nearly twenty journalists have been killed in Somalia in the past two years. Although we have heard of no complaints since the advent of the Sharif administration, in the past journalists often lamented that the TFG was as much of a threat to them as extremist elements in Somalia. They told us that if they reported favorably on the TFG, the extremists came after them, and vice-versa. Journalists appear to be pursuing the media law as a vehicle for protection from threats to their safety more than as a guide for their activities.

¶3. (SBU) The NMC has offered a two-page list of suggestions on the draft media law. Most of the suggestions pertain to the autonomy of the NMC, objecting to any limitations put on the council by the media law. While the TFG is not likely to grant each of these wishes, such as turning the state-run outlets into community-run outlets, many of the comments are reflective of the generally immature media environment in Somalia. As noted below, the Minister of Information has told us that he hopes for a more substantial discussion on

the law before it is presented for ratification.

¶4. (SBU) The Somali Coalition for Freedom of Expression (SOCFEX) claims to have drafted the original law in April of 2007 and remains engaged in the process. SOCFEX has called for international and Somalia media organizations to undertake various tasks, with the goal of passing this media law. From international organizations, SOCFEX calls for funds and expertise. From the Somali organizations, SOCFEX calls for coordination, activism, and public education. SOCFEX will hold a Canada-funded workshop in Nairobi in coming weeks to discuss the media law.

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The Government's View  
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¶5. (SBU) Prompted by the NMC, the new Minister of Information, Farahan Ali Mohamed, has promised to engage vigorously on this issue. Farahan told us recently that he is eager to work with the journalists to create a mutually acceptable and beneficial law, and then see the law through to signature by the President. However, he noted that the journalists have so far offered only minor changes from the 2007 version and he has proposed a major review of the law, even going so far as to ask for Post's suggestions on possible amendments to the draft law. He told us he is "searching for the best way to clear the air," but claims to be constrained by lack of a staff and other resources in his ministry.

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Post's Involvement  
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¶6. (SBU) Post is in direct contact with the Minister of Information and other TFG officials, as well as with several journalist groups. We continue to emphasize the importance of a free press in Somalia and the media's role in rebuilding the country. Having positive relationships with both the TFG and journalists, we believe we play an important coordinating role among all parties concerned with formation of this law.  
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